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NH Jacksonville Designated a Baby Friendly Medical Center

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By Capt. Lynn Welling, commanding officer, Naval Hospital Jacksonville

Northeast Florida Breastfeeding Collaborative Chair Heather Huffman explains the value of the international Baby Friendly certification that was awarded to Naval Hospital Jacksonville, Fla., Oct. 13. (Photo courtesy of Naval Hospital Jacksonville, Fla.)

On Oct. 13, together with a representative for Florida Lt. Governor Jennifer Carroll and the chair of the Northeast Florida Breastfeeding Collaborative, we announced Naval Hospital Jacksonville, Fla. was designated as a "Baby Friendly" hospital by Baby Friendly USA, a global initiative sponsored by the World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund. The Baby-Friendly designation is given after a rigorous on-site survey. It is maintained by continuing to practice 10 steps that include initiating breastfeeding in the first hour of life, keeping mothers and babies in the same room, and providing support groups for women who breastfeed.

Breastfeeding is one of the most effective preventive measures a mom can take to protect the health of her baby. Breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months of an infant's life can offer many health benefits for babies and mothers. Along with reducing mortality during infancy, breast milk has disease-fighting antibodies that help babies fight diseases and illnesses such as ear infections, diarrhea, asthma, diabetes, obesity, childhood leukemia and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Benefits to mom include a lower chance of breast and ovarian cancer, less chance of diabetes and increased postpartum weight loss. It also saves time and money for families in both baby formula and medical costs.

As a hospital that welcomes two to three babies into the world every day, we recognize the importance of supporting a mother's decision to breastfeed. We want and should be doing everything possible to provide our youngest heroes with the best start in life. And we are making a difference. On average, 80 percent of mothers who deliver at Naval Hospital Jacksonville, Fla. are exclusively breastfeeding their babies when they leave our hospital. Of the more than 20,000 facilities that have received the Baby Friendly designation worldwide, 119 facilities are certified in the United States. And to help encourage more Baby Friendly hospitals, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently awarded $6 million to the National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality to help hospitals nationwide move

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toward Baby Friendly.

Given the considerable benefits to both baby and mom, having Baby Friendly hospitals like ours is a very important step. It doesn't need to stop there. We can all do our part to encourage breastfeeding.   Support from a family member, friend, co-worker, spouse or medical professional can make all the difference in whether a mother begins and continues to breastfeed. Remember, it's about improving the health of our children by providing each and every one of them the best possible foundation for a lifetime of good health.

For more information about the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative visit

www.babyfriendlyusa.org.

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